



Here's what really frightened Sigourney Weaver: 'We had no script and we had no director, and at best these things can be nightmares'

LEFT: Despite having less than half the special effects of its predecessor, *Alien 3* still contains plenty of hi-tech wizardry.

As one of his friends puts it: "He was right out of the naval academy school, and he got put at the helm of the *Titanic*."

To add to Fincher's problems, the producers decided to cut the shooting schedule. Fincher would only get 25 special effects shots, less than half what *Aliens* had. Weaver thought the shortened schedule insane.

"*Alien* took 16½ weeks, and *Aliens* took 18 weeks," she says. "Why did they think they could make the third one in 13 weeks?"

Weaver was also sceptical about Fincher's appointment.

"All I heard about him was, he's very attractive and all the women he works with fall in love with him (Fincher's credits include videos for Madonna)," she says. "He wasn't a serious contender."

When Weaver met Fincher at a meeting set up by the producers, she asked him what he had in mind for her character Ripley.

"He said, 'How do you feel about ... bald?'" Weaver says. "I sort of looked at him, and I said, 'Well, of course, if I make the picture bald, I'll have to make more money.' At that moment, I was willing to follow him anywhere."

But Weaver's enthusiasm was not long-lived.

On the first day of shooting, she was lying naked on a table, covered only by a sheet. Weaver was wearing a contact lens to make her eye look bloody, leaving her almost blind. Fincher called over the production's bug wrangler, who was carrying a cup full of ... lice, the script said.

"David said, 'Just sprinkle a few bugs on her forehead,'" says Weaver. "And my eyes are open and I'm talking, and all these bugs drop on my face. They went in my ears and my eyes, and I — who pride myself on having worked with gorillas and

everything and being a good trouper — I went nuts.

"Do you realise what it's like to be naked and blind and have bugs thrown in your face? It was the worst beginning with a director I could imagine."

But the lice turned out to be cute baby crickets, and from there things went relatively smoothly (even though the studio didn't finalise the budget until a few days into shooting, and the writers didn't deliver a "final" script for two weeks).

Fincher won Weaver back completely a few weeks later when they shot a scene in which she does an autopsy on the dead Newt — the girl she spent the entire second movie saving — to make sure no alien is hidden inside her.

"To me, it's the most emotionally charged scene because you're doing something absolutely despicable to the person that you love more than anybody in the world, and I was terrified because that scene was so important to me," Weaver says. "If David had been insensitive, it would have been a nightmare. But he was great, incredibly sweet and supportive. You do find out what people are like when you shoot. He's not only brilliant but also a very good guy."

But Fincher had an unhappy knack of making studio executives with millions of dollars on the line a tad nervous. "I'm not making this movie for 50 million people," he

THE



RIGHT: Sigourney is reunited with an old "friend".

SEVEN years passed between the first *Alien* and the second. Six more years would pass before the third was ready to unreel.

"It's a little like childbirth," explains the star of all three movies, Sigourney Weaver. "The first couple of years after you make an *Alien* film, the idea of doing another one is not that appealing."

Despite negotiating a \$US4 million salary — a record amount for an actress — Weaver could be forgiven for thinking she had rushed into *Alien 3*.

"My heart's like this," she says, shaking her hands in the air. "I had to start working on this picture, and we had no script, and we had no director, and at best these things can be nightmares."

And Weaver is not really exaggerating. When she signed on with Twentieth Century Fox, the studio was in a jam. It had invested somewhere between \$5 million and \$13 million on scripts, sets and pay-or-play commitments such as Weaver's salary.

New Zealand director Vincent Ward was signed after three scripts from different writers had been rejected. At one stage, writer David Twohy was working on the project and was phoned by an L.A. reporter who asked him about competing drafts.

Twohy made a phone call and found out Ward had been working with another scriptwriter. He sent in his script and never heard from the producers again.

Ward was let go just before shooting was about to commence and the script was not yet complete. The solution? Hire a director with no experience!

David Fincher, 27, is probably the only first-time filmmaker ever hired to direct a \$50 million movie.

once said during shooting, "I'm making it for eight people, my friends, people who know cameras and lighting."

Weaver remembers Fincher's response when the studio started pressuring him to bolster the horror side of the film.

"He said to them, 'We all sat here and decided to make a china cup, a beautiful, delicate china cup. You can't tell me we should have made a beer mug'."

When shooting went 23 days over schedule and untold millions over budget, the producers finally pulled the plug.

For most of the cast and crew, the end came none too soon. "It was a general relief for everyone," says actor Charles Dutton.

For the next year Fincher, who was paid \$US250,000, labored in the editing room before being given an extra eight days shooting in December 1991 to finish the project. But, incredibly, the film looks set to be a huge success.

Weaver, who is not given to hype, says: "It really stands on its own as a brilliant Alien picture, very unusual and very provocative."

Studio executive Michael London adds: "There's no question we've had our dark hours, but in the end Fincher's vision and his talent are all up there on the screen. David doesn't see it this way, but I think all the battling actually helped it get there."

*From John H.
Richardson
in Los Angeles*

I went nuts. Do you realise what it's like to be naked and blind and have bugs thrown in your face? 9

BALD TRUTH ABOUT ALIEN 3